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Draft report

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Addendum

Programme questions

Proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

1. At its 12th meeting, on 11 June 1998, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on priority-setting within the medium-term plan (A/53/134).

2. The Controller introduced the report of the Secretary-General and responded to queries raised during the Committee's consideration of the report.

Discussion

3. Views were expressed on the importance of priority-setting. It was noted, however, that difficulties had been encountered over the years, in particular in terms of the breadth and scope of priorities, which, at times, have been all-encompassing. Nevertheless, it was considered important to ensure that priorities continued to be established as means of focusing on issues that Member States considered as requiring specific attention within the medium-term plan period. At the same time, it was noted that there were also difficulties with establishing priorities at the subprogramme level because of the new structure of the medium-term plan, whereby many subprogrammes now replaced previous programmes. Views were expressed that priorities should be established also for the short term, in the context of the budget outline, to guide the allocation of resources in the programme budget.

4. Views were expressed that priorities should be established only in the medium-term plan, which is a translation of mandates into programmes and serves as the principal policy directive of the Organization. Views were also expressed that resources should be commensurate with the mandates for their full implementation.

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5. Views were expressed in support of the recommendation that priorities be established in the context of the Secretary-General's proposed budget outline, rather than the medium-term plan. It was considered that the budget outline was the logical place to include priorities because it provided direct guidance to the Secretary-General on resource allocation in his proposed programme budget. It was also considered that the two-year cycle of the budget outline made it easier to take into account the latest legislative developments, which may affect priorities.

6. Views were expressed that it was important to avoid having more than one set of priorities, which might be inconsistent and could send mixed signals to the Secretary-General.

7. Further views were expressed that priorities were dynamic and could only be changed by the legislative bodies, but, once established, they must be observed in the implementation of mandated programmes and activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

[8. The Committee decided to recommend that priorities continue to be established in the medium-term plan, which is the principal policy directive of the United Nations. The priorities, as determined by the General Assembly in the medium-term plan, shall guide the allocation of resources in the subsequent programme budgets through the mechanisms provided for in General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986. The priorities contained in the budget outline should be in conformity with the priorities in the medium-term plan.

9. The Committee emphasized that priorities, once established by the General Assembly, cannot be changed or altered unless the Assembly decides otherwise.]